



# Reducing the risk for gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work

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Several factors can increase the risk for gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in the world of work. Identifying and mitigating these risk factors is essential in efforts to prevent GBVH and build safer workplaces for all. Drawing on the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)'s Chart of Risk Factors for Harassment and Responsive Strategies and the U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, here are four risk factors for GBVH and examples of strategies that mitigate those risks.

## 1. *Homogenous Workforce*

**Risk factor:** A homogeneous workforce by definition lacks diversity among its workers; examples include the construction (male-dominated) and domestic (female-dominated) workforces. In some homogenous workforces, certain workers may feel isolated or “othered” because they are working in jobs from which they have historically been excluded due to discrimination, gender stereotyping and harmful social norms. This may increase the risk that these workers will experience GBVH because they are perceived as challenging the culture and status quo of that workforce. The workers who fit the gender stereotype for an occupation may not welcome the presence of this culture change and lash out through harassment and discrimination. Female-dominated workforces can also have a higher risk of GBVH when the supervisors tend to be male, which leads to power imbalance that can increase risk.

### Mitigation strategies:

- **Culture change:** Changing the culture within an organization to create a respectful and safe workplace for all workers can mitigate the risk of GBVH. Programs like RISE Up 4 Equity and Be That One Guy offer tools and strategies to create more inclusive work environments. This culture change can in turn support recruitment and retention of communities underrepresented in the workforce.
- **Buy-in from leadership:** The EEOC's Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Construction Industry details the importance of committed and engaged leadership, strong and comprehensive anti-harassment policies and trainings, and treating harassment holistically throughout the organization. Engagement from leadership is critical in ensuring that equity measures will be taken seriously by supervisors and workers.
- **Inclusive recruiting and retention practices:** The Women's Bureau's Tools for Building an Equitable Infrastructure Workforce outlines strategies and best practices for recruiting and retaining more women into construction, manufacturing and clean energy jobs. Using inclusive language and images in recruitment materials, targeting places women frequent, and providing services such as child care and transportation are all proven strategies that can increase women's participation in these male-dominated industries.



## 2. Isolated workplaces

**Risk factor:** In an isolated work environment, employees work far away from others or out of the public view, leaving few opportunities to interact with other workers or the public while on shift. Examples include farm workers, hotel workers, janitors and home health care workers. Isolation can increase the risk of GBVH because workers may be alone with someone perpetuating abusive or harassing behavior with no witnesses present who could stop or report the behavior.

**Mitigation strategies:** Strategies that reduce isolation for workers, such as physically or digitally connecting them to other people, can be used to counteract the risks of an isolated workplace. These strategies are most effective when they are worker-led or worker-created, as workers have the most comprehensive understanding of their risks in the workplace.

- **Physically or digitally connecting workers:** In Chicago, UNITE HERE Local 1 responded to the epidemic of customer harassment and assault of hotel workers who cleaned rooms in isolation by launching the “Hands Off Pants On” campaign. This campaign ultimately led the City of Chicago to pass an ordinance requiring all hotel workers to be given panic buttons to carry with them while working in isolation, a solution proposed by the workers themselves. Other states and cities, such as New Jersey and Washington, now also require panic buttons for hotel staff.
- **Sample employment agreements:** Many domestic workers, such as home health care workers and nannies, are isolated from other workers and the public in their employers’ private homes. This isolation creates disempowerment; domestic workers may have no witnesses to harassing or illegal behavior from their employer, which creates challenges to deterring or reporting the behavior. The Department of Labor has developed sample employment agreements to open a dialogue between domestic workers and employers. These agreements clearly outline workers’ rights as well as safe workplace standards, including the right to work free from gender-based violence and harassment. .

## 3. Customer-facing workplaces

**Risk factor:** Workers who regularly interact with customers, clients or patients—such as restaurant workers, flight attendants, store clerks or bus drivers—are heavily reliant on customer satisfaction to maintain their employment. This increases the risk of GBVH, as workers may be pressured, including by their supervisors, to tolerate inappropriate and illegal behavior to maintain their tips or retain their jobs. Additionally, customer-facing workplaces tend to have a mentality that the “customer is always right,” which can lead employers to side with customers over their workers.

**Mitigation strategies:** Effective mitigation strategies include eliminating workers’ reliance on customer satisfaction or clearly stating that illegal and harassing behavior by anyone within the establishment is not tolerated. This can include:

- **Eliminating the tipped minimum wage:** Nearly three-quarters (71%) of women restaurant workers reported having been sexually harassed at some point during their employment at a restaurant. The rate of sexual harassment is much higher among tipped women workers (76%) than non-tipped women workers (52%). Worker advocacy organizations like Women’s Bureau FARE Grantee Restaurants Opportunities Centers United (ROC United) are working to eliminate the tipped minimum wage and create better training standards among restaurant workers.
- **Creating a code of conduct:** Several employers in the hospitality industry, such as Brave Noise, have created codes of conduct that clearly state that harassment is an unwelcome behavior and customers will be asked to leave if they are making staff uncomfortable. This creates a clear deterrence for customers, as they are on notice that inappropriate behavior is not tolerated.

## 4. Cultural and language differences

**Risk factor:** Cultural and language differences among workers can increase the risk of GBVH because workers may face exploitation if they are less aware of workplace norms and rights. Migrant workers, for example, may be at

higher risk for GBVH when employers take advantage of cultural and language differences by only posting workplace rights notices in English in order to perpetuate illegal behavior, including GBVH.

**Mitigation strategies:** One tool to mitigate cultural and language differences is to provide culturally competent workplace education to ensure that workers know their rights. For example, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB)'s website [MigrantWorker.gov](https://migrantworker.gov) provides information on migrant workers' rights, including the right to be free from discrimination and harassment, in several languages. Similarly, several Women's Bureau FARE grantees, including Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Justice for Migrant Women and Farmworker Justice, are utilizing their grant funds to provide know your rights information on GBVH to migrant and farm workers. These organizations work within communities to create culturally competent trainings and materials, as well as ensuring that workers are trained to provide information to their peers.

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